233 583 clearly pointed at marriage, when movements of cattle from kraal to kraal are equivalent to lines on a genealogical chart. It is also emphasized by division of sacrificial meat among agnatic and cognatic relatives.

233 553 The importance of cattle in Nuer life and thought is further exemplified in personal names. Men are frequently addressed by names that refer to the form and colour of their favourite oxen, and women take names from oxen and from the cows they milk. Even small boys call one another by ox-names when playing together in the pastures, a child usually taking his name from the bull-calf of the cow he and his mother milk. Often a man receives an ox-name or cow-name at birth. Sometimes the name of a man which is handed down to posterity is his ox-name and not his birth-name. Hence a Nuer genealogy may sound like an inventory of a kraal. The linguistic identification of a man with his favourite ox cannot fail to affect his attitude to the beast, and to Europeans the custom is the most striking evidence of the pastoral mentality of the Nuer.

233 ●775 Since cattle are a Nuer's most cherished possession being an essential food-supply and the most important social asset, it is easy to understand why they play a foremost part in ritual. A man establishes contact with the ghosts and spirits through his cattle. If one is able to obtain the history of each cow in a kraal, one obtains at the same time not only an account of all the kinship links and affinities of the owners but also of all their mystical connexions. Cows are dedicated to the spirits of the lineages of the owner and of his wife and to any personal spirit that has at some time possessed either of them. Other beasts are dedicated to ghosts of the dead. By rubbing ashes along the back of a cow or ox one may get into touch with the spirit or ghost associated with it and ask it for assistance. Another way of communicating with the dead and with spirits is by sacrifice, and no Nuer ceremony is complete without the sacrifice of a ram, he-goat, or ox.

233 183 We have seen in a brief survey of some Nuer institutions and customs that most of their social behaviour directly concerns their cattle. A fuller study of their culture would show everywhere the same dominant interest in cattle, e.g. in their folklore. They are always talking about their beasts. I used some-

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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[775]
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783

The ghost of the dead stranger,

no less than that of a fellow tribesman, may haunt the slayer, and the mere act of homicide creates a situation of spiritual danger.[1] This is a religious concept, but it does not provide an effective sanction against homicide because the consequences can be avoided.

(ii) The killing of a fellow tribesman, and to a much lesser extent a fellow Nuer of another tribe who is within the orbit of the killer's social sphere, is a wrong because it is an offence against the stability of society in its most extended form. But it is a private delict and not a crime, and demands only retaliation or restitution. The closer the relationship between the component tribal segments involved, the greater the sanction for restitution. It is also an act which brings spiritual contamination upon the killer and his kin, and expiation and ritual purification are necessary. Moreover the closer the relationship the more dangerous the consequences and the greater the need for purification, because the act of homicide amounts to a more grievous breach of kinship observance.

(iii) Finally in the narrowest definition of blood relationship, where kinship is a reality and not merely a fictional social form—that is, within the lineage or the extended family group—restitution becomes less and less necessary because the persons who assist in the payment of compensation are also the recipients. To put this in negative form, those who are in duty bound to take vengeance are also those upon whom vengeance should be wreaked. The situation then reached is so near to patricide or fratricide that the idea of vengeance or restitution must disappear. The situation is indeed something akin to suicide, which is the negation of the principle of kinship solidarity, and, as in suicide, the danger is not the threat of retaliation nor the need to pay cattle as compensation to some other group but spiritual damnation from within.[2] Hence the act does not constitute a private delict but is

[1] To the Nuer this idea applies to all mankind. The disgruntled spirit (*cien*) of the dead man will haunt his killer and bring him misfortune or even death. The act of spilling blood in itself creates a condition of impurity which afflicts the killer, amounting to an impairment of his ritual status, and therefore requires expiation. Hence the ceremony of *bir*, which includes not only sacrifice but the letting of the slayer's blood. The danger involved in the spilling of human blood is exemplified in the rules concerning the destruction of certain categories of anti-social persons, notably the *rudh* or ghoul, with the consent of the community. No blood must be spilt; the ghoul should be beaten to death with sticks. No such contamination arises from the spilling of animals' blood except that of an elephant. For this the ceremony of letting the blood of the killer must be performed or the ghost (again *cien*) of the animal will haunt him. It is especially interesting to note in this connexion that elephants are closely associated with mankind and are linked in mythology to the genealogies of certain lineages.

[2] This statement is, of course, qualified by the actual relationship of the persons concerned. Between brothers or half-brothers there could be no payment of compensation; between patrilineal cousins some form of compensation might be paid, but conditioned then and subsequently by other mutual obligations in connexion with cattle. The real test probably lies in the obligation to marry a wife to the name of a dead kinsman. If the killer were also the man, or one of the men, who normally might be expected to discharge this duty on behalf of the deceased, then no form of compensation would be necessary.

11:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1945
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

can only do so in a qualified sense. However, it is difficult to construct an adequate terminology to describe every type of Nuer procreative union and bio-domestic group, and we shall have to compromise between the requirements of strict social morphology and the privilege of everyday speech. In speaking of the union between a man acting in the place of a ghost and his "wife" I shall speak of "ghost-marriage" and likewise I shall call a child born of such a union, and begotten by the man who stands in the place of the ghostly pater, a "ghost-child". In this I conform to Nuer usage for they speak of a woman so married as a *cek jooka* ("the wife of a ghost") and of her children as *gaat jooka* ("children of a ghost"). We may therefore describe the family that develops out of a ghost-marriage as a "ghost-family" in acknowledgment of the ghostly status of the pater of the children. Their genitor and foster-father has the status of vicarious husband to their mother. A ghost-family is therefore a variety of the legal family. The legal family is contained in its structure.

It would be pedantic to refuse the word family to the group consisting of a woman, her vicarious husband and her children by him, for he not only stands in the place of the husband and in the place of the pater but his behaviour towards his "wife" and "children" is, at any rate during the minority of his sons, indistinguishable from the behaviour of a man who is husband and pater in full legal sense. It would give a false impression were this group to be called a "natural family" in contrast to a "legal family" because the woman's partner has the same legal rights over her as her husband would have were he alive, and he exercises the same authority over his children in their minority as their pater would do. During the minority of the children the legal family and this other group in which one member plays a vicarious part are alike in patterns of behaviour and sentiment. At that time it is only in a formal legal sense, particularly with regard to descent, that they differ. It must be understood, therefore, that when I speak of a ghost-marriage I refer to a union of three persons, a ghost and his wife and the man who takes the place of the ghost in marital relations, and the children born of the wife. Using this terminology, which I admit is clumsy, the difference between a legal marriage which is an actual marriage and a legal marriage which is a ghost-marriage is that the first is a union of husband and wife, while the second is a union between ghostly husband, pro-husband and wife; and the difference between a legal family which is a simple family and a legal family which is a ghost family is that the first is a group consisting of a husband and wife and children born of the wife in the union of marriage, while the second is a group consisting of a ghostly husband, a pro-husband, a wife, and children of the wife born in the union of marriage. It must be remembered that the pro-husband is not the pater of the children.

When Nuer speak of a ghost-marriage they generally say that the vicarious husband has "kindled the fire of the dead." Thus when a man marries his father's brother a wife they say of him *Ce mac gwanlende pet*, "He has kindled the fire of his father's brother."

A very great many Nuer domestic groups are ghost-families. They must be almost as numerous as simple legal families. Not only do many

11:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1945
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587 768 593 591 dead, so that they may view with equanimity the departure of the widow and her children, having no feelings of close parentage towards the sons and being assured that they will receive whatever bride-wealth is their due on the marriages of the daughters, wherever they may be brought up.

[611] Most depends upon the decision of the widow herself (*riet cek*). If she determines to live away from her husband's village with a stranger his kinsmen warn her that any children she may bear are the children of her husband and that one day they will bring them to their father's home. Among the Eastern Nuer, only if she does something that deeply offends [586] them will they divorce her. Among the Western Nuer they may divorce her if she has not borne her husband two children but how often this is done I cannot say.

Occasionally, I was told, a man directs (*nop*) from his deathbed that a certain kinsman is to live with his wife. It is difficult for a woman to defy ●[776] such an injunction because Nuer believe that if she does so the ghost of her husband will haunt her and she will cease to bear children or her children will die.

587 611 A widow who lives with a stranger after the death of her husband is called *cek ma lak* and a child born of such a union is called *gat laka*. The children of a widow wherever they are born, or by whomsoever begotten, count as children of her dead husband, the man to whom she was married by payment of cattle, whether she was married to him in his lifetime or vicariously after his death. If the husband dies, or was already dead before his marriage, the actual configuration of the household may alter but the formal structure of the family remains the same. Indeed the family may never be a group of people with real interrelations because the husband and the father may have died many years before his marriage to his wife and the birth of his children. Among Nuer the pater is the husband to the mother. His legal fatherhood is defined by his status to the mother of the children and not by his physiological functions.

587 593 A *cek ma lak* is translated in this paper as "widow-concubine" for she is living simply as a concubine to her lover and he has no legal rights over her. He cannot compel her to live with him and cannot claim compensation if she commits adultery. He has no legal control over the children who can be taken away from him by her husband's kinsmen whenever they choose to remove them. His position is thus very different from that of a man living with his dead brother's wife. If she leaves him he can divorce her and if she commits adultery he can obtain redress. Moreover, he has legal control of the children during their minority and no one can take them from him as he stands in the place of the pater.

The group that results from the union between a man and a widow-concubine when the children are born by the concubine to her lover is a natural family which stands in what is sometimes glaring opposition to the legal family. The corner-stone of the natural family is the genitor who is acting as husband and foster-father. The corner-stone of the legal family is the dead husband and pater. According to circumstances the position of the genitor in a household of this kind may be precarious or his relations to members of his natural family may approximate to

11:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1945
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587 Karlual ♂ then married
592 Nyaweny ♀—Kong ♂ who is also dead. She bore him Tang ♂ and Gai ♂. Lately he has married Nyariek ♀—Cang ♂ by whom he has an unweaned child. He has an unmarried concubine who was temporarily absent during my visit. She has borne him two sons, Twong ♂ and [173] Kong ♂. Cattle have been paid to legitimatize Twong ♂ and more cattle [43] will be paid to legitimatize Kong ♂.

Karlual's brother, Panyuan, lives in his byre, and his sister's sons, Nhial ♂—Rainen ♂ and Galuak ♂—Rainen ♂, spend most of their time there and house some of their cattle there.

592 736 *Homestead No. X.* Meat ♂—Col ♂. He is unmarried. In his byre lives his half-brother, Wec ♂—Jany ♂, who has married a wife to the name of one of his father's brothers. She has borne him Korwai ♂ (dead), Nhial ♂, Nyajuacni ♀, and Nyapuot ♀. As he has no cattle, he has sold his byre to Col ♀ of Homestead No. II, and as he is too lazy to cultivate a garden, his wife and family, to save themselves from starvation, live at her sister's home in another village. He wanders hither and thither and scrounges on other people. Another occupant of this byre is Meat's sister's son, Bilieu ♂—Lam ♂.

592 607 *Homestead No. XI.* Jal ♂—Ngunjuk (brother of Col of homestead No. II). The two brothers live at a distance because their wives do not get on well together. His brother, Bol ♂, and his half-brother, Pan ♂, share his byre. Both are unmarried. Jal ♂ has married a wife to the name of his father's brother, Muong ♂—Ret ♂. This woman, Nyaluak ♀—Deng ♂ has bore him Cuong ♂ and Nyalia ♀. One of the huts in this homestead belonged to Jal's mother who died last year. See Diagram No. VII.

592 588 *Homestead No. XII.* Nyawal ♀—Col ♂. Her husband was Lam ♂ of the Ngwol clan. She bore him Rwac ♂ (dead) and Nyakwoli ♀. After his death she cohabited with Juan ♂ of the Jikul clan, by whom she bore Bilieu ♂, Nyakuan ♀, Nyalieth ♀, Ghuth ♂, Bathu ♀, and Nyalita ♀. She is past child-bearing and does not cohabit with any man. Her cattle are housed in the byre of her brother Meat ♂, of Homestead No. X.

592 588 [175] *Homestead No. XIII.* Nyading ♀—Kulang ♂. Her daughter, Nyamani ♀, was married by Tang ♂—Karlual ♂ to the name of Ran ♂, a brother of his father (though begotten by Kwenwar while Karlual ♂ was begotten by Jany ♂). Ran ♂ had died before initiation and his ghost began to kill Karlual's wives and children and had to be quieted by being married a wife. Nyamani ♀ lives with her mother, Nyading ♀, whose husband, Dak ♂—Jiong ♂, is dead. She bore Dak ♂ three children: Nyamani ♀, Nyaghok ♀, and Gai ♂. Dak ♂ by another wife begat Nyajaani ♀ who also lives in this homestead. Nyajaani ♀ was married by Pathol ♂—Nyaalbor ♂ of the Lual section and bore him a blind son who also lives here. She refused to live with her husband's brother when he [84] died, so the cattle of her bride-wealth were returned. She was then married to another man and divorced by him. She now cohabits with Mokwac ♂ of Homestead No. XVI and has borne him a son.

Homestead No. XIV. Loc ♂—Jany ♂. He married a wife, Can ♀—Giling ♂ of the Reng section of the Jikany tribe, to the name of his dead

Cien

753 775 *Cien* is the vengeance wrought by a ghost which produces sickness and misfortune; like the other Nilotic tribal groups, the Nuer hold the concept of *cien*, and believe that ghostly vengeance will fall on those who have wronged a man and allowed him to die with a grudge. Fear of *cien* tends to make a Nuer more careful to treat others with justice.

[782] To stop the effects of *cien* it is necessary to make a sacrifice to god in the sky and, when possible, to make reparation.

NUER CURSES AND GHOSTLY VENGEANCE

789 Curses are uttered by someone who has been wronged. The efficacy of a curse is largely conditioned by the relationship of the curser to the cursed. The Nuer regard the curse of a mother or father as serious; it may result in death. The curse of a mother's brother is feared because, being of a different lineage, he may curse cattle, which is the worst of all curses in the eyes of the Nuer. The curse of an eldest child is feared by the mother and maternal uncle.

There are other curses imposed by those of the *ric* (age-set), by the leopard-skin chief, the man of the cattle and *guk*, the prophet.(1) The Nuer also believe in conditional curses which may be laid on a man and become operative if he, or any of his descendants, should do a certain thing.

RITUAL PERSONS

791 There are several ritual figures among the Nuer who are important in the village community.

1. *The Leopard-Skin Chiefs.* They have a special relationship with the earth and can affect the welfare of the crops. They also have a limited role in rain-making and in the general regulation of the weather. They conduct the rituals concerned with homicide, with cleansing the parties to incestuous relations, with preventing feuds, and protecting warriors on raiding expeditions.

2. *The Wut Ghok.* Members of certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle; they are asked to cure cows of various diseases and to ensure the fertility of barren animals. Their role is, however, a more restricted one than that of the leopard-skin chief, who has functions relating to social as well as to natural processes. Usually the *wut ghok* is a member of a stranger lineage, as is the leopard-skin chief, and this is presumably an advantage when they have to mediate between powerful and antagonistic lineages.

3. *Totemic Experts.* There are a number of totemic experts whose ritual connections with lions, crocodiles, and other dangerous creatures, enable them to influence the beasts' behaviour to the advantage of the community. A totemic specialist is the possessor of the spirit of his totem; he has no political significance.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Africa*, 1949, XIX, p.299.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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CHAPTER VI

SOUL AND GHOST

I

775 RELIGION is the reciprocal relation between God and man. Our study of Nuer religion is therefore a study not only of this people's conception of *kwoth*, God, but also of their conception of *ran*, man, and of the relation between the two conceptions. They stand to each other as opposites, symbolized in the opposites of sky and earth; and this is one of the salient contrasts of Nuer thought. I have already discussed the ideas they have about God, and I now propose to discuss some of their ideas about man. We can perhaps best start this discussion by considering what happens at death when man disintegrates into his three component parts, *ring*, flesh, *yiegh*, breath or life, and *tie*, intellect or soul.

764 Nuer say that a man who does not fear death summons his family and closest kin to his death-bed, but all who are not grave-diggers leave his homestead immediately he is dead, and the grave is dug and the corpse buried as quickly as possible and without ceremony. Usually only two or three people dig the grave and these are senior kinsmen, or sometimes kinswomen. A member of a man's age-set must not dig his grave, and all children and young people keep away from the homestead, even those nearest to the dead, such as his sons and younger brothers, however grieved they may be at their loss. They may weep but they do [761] not attend the burial, for death is an evil thing and only those who must get rid of the corpse should go near the grave. Men do not wail, and if women wail it is not for long, just a little as soon as the person has died and again shortly before he is buried to let the neighbours know of the death and burial. I have never witnessed a burial and it was with difficulty I obtained a description of what happens. Death is a subject Nuer do not care to speak about.

The shaft is dug near the left-hand side (as one faces it) of the dead man's hut or, if he dies in camp, his windscreen. This is the *kwi giakni*, the side of evil. The grave is dug to the depth of a

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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764 in front of the dead man's hut. He also addresses the ghost and
782 tells him that he has been taken away and must turn his face to the ground and not trouble the living: 'friend, this (beast) is yours (for you). Now turn yourself to the ghosts. Turn yourself away from us. Death was not made by us in old times, it was made by God, friend. Do not trouble your people with bad dreams but regard us favourably. God has not entirely destroyed you, for there are those who come after you; you have children left behind you.' If the family have no animal to sacrifice the master of ceremonies sacrifices by cutting in two a wild cucumber. 'The half of the living, the half of the children, the right half, remains outside, being placed in the thatch of the hut. The half of the dead man is thrown into the bush.' With it is thrown out of the village the contagion of death. They say of this sacrifice '*ba kier piny ka del*', '(the dead man) is expiated in the earth with a goat', and that the badness goes into the earth with the blood and the chyme.

765 Members of the family mourn till the mortuary ceremony has been held some months after death. They shave their heads after the burial but then they do not shave them again, neither do they treat the hair with ashes nor depilate their bodies, till the period of mourning is ended. They also remove all ornaments, and the closest relatives wear a *dep liath*, a mourning cord of grass, around their waists and necks. There are no prescribed food and sex abstentions during the period of mourning though I was told that close kin may abstain from sexual relations for a few days after death 'because they are sad and thinking of their dead friend'. Less closely related persons and the wives of kin show their respect by leaving their hair untended but for a shorter time, perhaps only a month or so. When people are in mourning they do not attend dances. People do not mourn for a small child, for
[858] 'a small child is not a person (*ran*). When he tethers the cattle and herds the goats he is a person. When he cleans the byres and spreads the dung out to dry and collects it and carries it to the fires he is a person.' A man will not say that he has a son till the
[766] child is about six years of age. A small child is buried by old women and without sacrifice.

765 Four to six months after burial the mortuary ceremony is held.
775 It is known as *wocene cuol* or *cuol woc* because its purpose is to wipe out (*woc*) the debt (*cuol*) which Nuer feel to be due on account of the death. They seem to feel that there is some mis-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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fortune hanging over them and that the death may be only part of it. It is necessary to clear off the whole debt before any further evil comes to them. Otherwise people may cut their feet when fishing, pierce their feet when hunting, cut themselves with spears when dancing, or indeed meet with almost any misfortune, even death. Nuer also feel that if the dead is not appeased by this ceremony he may return in anger to fetch the living, especially his wives and children, and the cattle.

I have only once witnessed this ceremony, rather early in my study of the Nuer, and I have supplemented my account of what I then saw with statements made to me later. The ceremony was held at Dini in the Lou tribal area for the ghost of an important old man called Lam. When I arrived at the dead man's village towards evening the people had just sacrificed an ox outside his kraal. This sacrifice had been for Tutthiang, Lam's father, for it was known that Lam had intended before he died to sacrifice this animal in his father's honour. Next morning, before sunrise, an ox and a cow and its bull-calf were speared at their tethering-pegs in Lam's kraal. People watched to see how they fell; because if a sacrificed animal falls over cleanly on its side, especially if it falls on its right side, it is a good omen and shows that the ghost is content, whereas if it falls on its head or totters about before falling it is a bad omen. It is regarded as important that a cow still giving milk should be sacrificed for the ghost of an old man who had a position in his community lest he should feel that sufficient sacrifice had not been made. To kill a cow in milk is the greatest sacrifice a Nuer can make. An animal must be sacrificed for each wife of the dead by one of her sons or by some kinsman on behalf of her hut. If the ceremony is for a young unmarried man his favourite ox should be sacrificed. A cow should be sacrificed for a senior woman if the herd is large, and a male calf for a young woman. However, there are no hard and fast rules about the matter. The people of the home should sacrifice what they can afford, cattle if possible, but a goat or sheep if they cannot obtain at least a male calf, which is unlikely, because a man can generally borrow one from a neighbour.

At Dini after the cattle had been killed they were skinned and the meat apportioned to the various categories of kin. It is an absolute rule, however, that no member of the ghost's age-set may partake of the meat of animals sacrificed at his mortuary

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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765 nourished secret resentment in his heart, or a son may have had relations with one of his father's wives and not confessed his guilt. I was told that the bad half of the goat was eaten by persons unrelated to the dead man and the good half by members of his family.

765 768 Lam's goods which had been tied up for later distribution on the first day were now brought out again and divided among members of the family by the eldest son assisted by the master of ceremonies and some senior kinsmen. The clothes, beads, and ostrich-shell girdles were given to Lam's wives. His series of metal arm-rings was broken up and the rings distributed among the men and boys of the family.

765 The ceremonies were concluded by all the people shaving their heads. On this account the mortuary ceremony is often spoken of as the *mut*, the cutting. The cutting of the hair of the kin symbolizes the cutting off of the dead from the living just as in the marriage ceremonies the rite, known by the same word *mut*, by which the bride's hair is shaved off, symbolizes the cutting of the ties between her and her family and kin. The mortuary ceremony is one of deep 'silence and sadness', the marriage ceremony one of 'happiness and laughter'. They also say of the dead man *ca je mut*, he has been cut off (by this ceremony). It is clear from the orations and actions of the mortuary ceremony that part, perhaps the main part, of their purpose is to cut the dead from the living. The dead man has to be given the full status of ghost and persuaded to accept it so that he will remain as a ghost and not try to return to the living with the taint of death on him. This is the constant refrain of the invocations: 'Now you ghosts, you are finished with us, you are the people of God, you are the people on the other side.'

775 765 761

That this is one of the main purposes of the ceremony is further shown by a curious observation I made in western Nuerland. There was living in a village there an unhappy-looking man of unkempt appearance, called Gatbuogh. This man had some years before gone on a distant journey and had not been heard of for a long time. Then there came to his village news of his death and in course of time the mortuary ceremony was held for him. He later returned home and was living in the village at the time of my visit. He was described as *joagh in tegh*, the living ghost. I was told '*ca tiede mut. ce tiede ma kene tie yang kel. ce te ni ringe*

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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775 765 761 *cunge'*, 'his soul was cut off. His soul went with the soul of the (sacrificed) ox together. His flesh alone remains standing.' His soul, the essential part of him, had gone and with it his social personality. Although people fed him he seems to have lost such privileges of kinship as pertain to the living and not to the dead. I was told that he could not partake of sacrificial meat because his agnatic kinship (*buth*) had been obliterated (*woc*) by the mortuary ceremony. A neighbour said to me 'he lives in our village with Baranyai but we do not count him a member of it because he is dead. The mortuary ceremony has been held for him.'

765 There were doubtless points I missed in the mortuary ceremony I witnessed and possibly some I did not hear about in later discussions with Nuer. A feature I did not observe but which, I was later told, is common, was the singing of hymns to the spirits of the air, in particular the hymn to *buk* which I have recorded earlier. These hymns are not an integral, and therefore essential, part of the ceremony and their meaning is in no way related to the matter in hand. They are in keeping, however, with the religious character of the rites and enhance it.

765 782 In conclusion I should say that Mayan told me at Dini that he would later cut the ears of the bulls of his dead father's herd and that this is always done when the dead man was a person of age and social importance. The cattle would then prosper. For such a man another ox may be sacrificed some months later. The master of ceremonies again prepares porridge for those who gather to honour the ghost, and the senior kinsmen again make speeches to God and to the dead man and to all the ghosts of the lineage. Before the animal is speared all the people, men, women and children, bring ashes of cattle-dung and rub them on the ox. I discuss the meaning of this act in later chapters. The meat is distributed to all present, and also the porridge and the beer, which has been prepared in advance. An ox sacrificed in this manner to honour a dead man is known as *thak bar* or *thak joka*. A man may at any time decide to honour his father in this way and Nuer sometimes set apart an ox or an old bull (*tut jookni*) for their dead fathers, as Lam had done for his father Tutthiang, and await a suitable occasion for sacrificing it, as when they see their fathers in dreams and know that they want something. An ox so set apart cannot be disposed of but must be kept in the herd till it is sacrificed.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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is a person of the above (*ran nhial*)' and that man, or ghost, 'is a person of the below (*ran piny*)'. The difference, and the contrast, is clearly seen in the Nuer belief that the soul of a person struck by lightning is changed into Spirit. It is evident also in the way they speak about their prophets and about sick persons. They say that Spirit comes from above and enters into them or takes hold of them. Since, therefore, Spirit and soul are conceived of as of different natures, the conception of Spirit cannot be derived from a development of the conception of soul. On the contrary, it is precisely because God and man are thought of as quite different sorts of being that Nuer can think of themselves in relation to God and that God can be represented in different ways to different persons and social groups. Therefore it is necessary, if we wish not only to avoid confusion but also to seize upon the essential content of Nuer religious thought, that we should speak of the 'soul' and not of the 'Spirit' of man and of the 'ghosts' and not of the 'spirits' of the departed.

It follows from the Nuer orientation towards Spirit that they are little interested in the ghosts of the dead, so long as they cause no trouble. When people 'disappear'—Nuer avoid using the word 'die'—only one thing is certain, that they have departed for good. 'They dwell apart, they have become ghosts.' It is taken for granted that people have some sort of existence after death, though Nuer do not presume to know where they have it or what kind of life it is that they lead. Sometimes they say that they may be under the earth and live a life like that they lived when they were on earth amid their cattle and dung fires in villages and camps. This seems to be the general opinion and it is perhaps strengthened by the discovery, when digging wells, of goats' dung and fire-stones deep down in the earth, for I have heard Nuer say that maybe these belong to the ghosts. But Nuer also say of a dead man '*ce mat ka kwoth*', 'he has joined God', and '*ce tiede wa nhial, ca ringde kwony*', 'his soul has gone above, (only) his flesh was buried'. One often hears also the idea expressed that the dead have lost their relationship to the living and have therefore no further claims on them for attentions and services, and that they have instead 'become kin to God' or have 'become God's people'. Sometimes Nuer say that since the dead are near to God they can intercede with him on behalf of their families and relatives. However, no one supposes he can know where is the *wec indit*, the great

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775 community (of the departed) which all, each in his turn, must join, or what it is like.

It is possible that the apparent contradiction between being under the earth and being with God in the sky arises from the vagueness of the concept of *tie* and in particular from the absence of any dogma that it is the *tie*, soul, which becomes a *joagh* (pl., *jook*), ghost. It is perhaps important that Nuer always speak of the *joagh* of the departed and never of his *tie* when speaking of his survival as a person. They speak of the 'ghosts' of the dead and not of the 'souls' of the dead. This distinction would seem to allow both for the idea of the dead leading some sort of existence in the Nuer sheol as shadowy replicas of the living and also at the same time for the idea that their souls are taken on high by God. They cannot say anything more definite about this question of what is conceived to survive, or how or where.

There is a further question: when does a man become a ghost? Here again there is no formal doctrine to help us. We have to draw conclusions from what seems to be implicit in the mortuary rites. As we have seen, they not only close the period of mourning and cleanse the home and the kin from the pollution of death but also send the dead man away to join the ghosts and cut him off formally and finally from the living. Only when that has been done can his property be taken by his heirs and his widows cohabit with those with whom they have decided to live. It follows that the dead must be thought to be in some way still among the living till he is dispatched by these rites to the community of the ghosts.[1]

775 196 The word for ghost, *joagh*, is found in various forms in all the Nilotic languages. In most of the Shilluk–Luo group of languages it means 'God' or 'Spirit'. In some of the Nilotic languages, including Nuer, the word is either the same as, or is closely related to, that used to denote plagues, pestilences, murrains, and indeed any serious sickness; and, this being so, it is perhaps wise to point out that such calamities are not thought to come from the ghosts but from God: '*ce jok ben piny*', Nuer say, '*ca kam piny e kwoth*', 'the murrain came to earth, it was given to earth by God'. In Nuer

[1] Robert Hertz ('Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort', *L'Année sociologique*, vol. x, 1907, reprinted in *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et de folklore*, 1928) was the first to draw attention to the universality of this idea and to show the great variety and complexity of its forms.

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the word *joagh* also means 'back' or 'behind' and this cannot be fortuitous, not only because in Dinka the word for a troublesome ghost, *cien*, likewise also means 'back' and 'behind', but also because it is a common Nuer refrain in speaking to, or about, the ghosts that they should have their backs to the living, the Nuer way of saying that they should keep away from the living. If they return to the living, except when summoned as witnesses on formal occasions, it is only to cause trouble, to fetch the living to join them in the place of the dead or to punish them for faults and shortcomings. We have already noted how pronounced is this apotropaic motif in the mortuary rites, and especially in the invocations spoken at them, the speakers frequently adjuring the dead '*bi rodu rit*', 'turn thyself about'. They ask the dead to turn away from the living, to turn his back on them. Father Crazzolara notes the same sentiment. He says that the dead are buried with their backs to the huts and their faces to the bush and that a dead man is addressed: 'turn thine eyes to the bush, do not turn them to the home'. He comments that this means that the dead man must not regard the doings of the living, for he might see something which offends him and draw another person after him to death.[1] The living do not want the dead to take any interest in their lives. The dead had best look after their own affairs and let the living look after theirs. That the ideas of 'behind' and of 'the ghosts' are related is further shown by the fact that Nuer sometimes use the phrase 'to go behind' as a euphemism for 'to go to the ghosts' and hence 'to die'.

It is consistent with the idea of the ghosts being turned away from the living so that they do not see their affairs that the ghosts are relatively unimportant in Nuer religious thought and practice, even the troublesome ones, which I discuss later; and they are in the ordinary course of affairs seldom mentioned. But though Nuer pay them little attention they cannot entirely ignore them, for there are some occasions when they are directly concerned with what is happening and their relationship to the living has to be emphasized, occasions of collective sacrifice (pp. 198–9), such as their funeral and mortuary ceremonies, settlement of blood-feuds started on account of their violent deaths, and the marriages of their children. Occasionally also dutiful sons honour their memory by sacrifice, especially if they have had vivid dreams

[1] Op. cit., p. 173.

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775 of the departed. On such occasions Nuer usually have a definite
782 ghost in mind, but in contexts in which the lineage as a whole is involved they may speak of *jook dial*, all the ghosts (of their lineage), though I have seldom heard them do so; and the reason for this is that when, on ceremonial occasions, Nuer speak of a lineage as a collectivity to which both dead and living belong they speak in terms of Spirit rather than of ghosts, of '*kwoth* which created our ancestor', rather than of the ancestor himself, and of '*kwoth* of our fathers', rather than the fathers themselves. The conception of the ghosts is subordinated to that of Spirit.

775 Nuer do not pray (*pal*) to the ghosts, which have no power in
782 themselves to grant requests. On such occasions as I have men-
776 tioned they may invoke (*lam*) them, but even when they do this the ghosts take second place to God in some such phrases as '*kwoth, yene jook*', 'God, thou and the ghosts'. Even when beasts are reserved for them, Nuer do not formally dedicate them to the ghosts as they do to their spirits, and though they sacrifice on certain occasions on their behalf or in their honour or memory, I do not think that it can be said that sacrifice is ever made to them, at any rate not to them by themselves, for it may be that in those sacrifices in which God and the ghosts are invoked together Nuer think of the sacrifice being to both. Even if this is so, the victim is consecrated to God and not to the ghosts. Likewise,
[778] though the ghosts are associated with the *riek* or post-shrine which elderly men erect in their homes, it is a shrine firstly to God as God of the hearth and in whatever further refractions he may be figured as the guardian of the family and lineage. It is therefore called *riek kwoth*, God's shrine, and not *riek jookni*, ghosts'
[769] shrine. There is no cult of the dead, and their graves, not being marked, are soon forgotten unless a tree happens to spring from the tomb, when it may be named after the man buried there. A man's memorial is not in some monument but in his sons.

768 Dead persons, though for the most part only men, are remem-
613 bered in their names, and this is a matter of great importance both for the Nuer themselves and also for an understanding on
551 our part of their sentiments. Every man likes to feel that his name will never be forgotten so long as his lineage endures and that in that sense he will always be a part of the lineage. Consequently, Nuer do not so much think of the ghosts of their forebears as being those members of their lineage who are in the home of the dead,

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III

When a ghost comes to trouble the living it is said to *cien* them. 775
It is useful to discuss this concept in the light of another, that of 789
biit, to curse,[1] because the two are closely connected, the ability of a ghost to harm being the *post mortem* operation of the projective power of the psyche, the power to harm another through the mind and the heart.

The curse of certain persons in Nuer society is believed to be 789
effective if they have been wronged. If they utter curses without due cause (*cuong*) the curses will either be ineffective or harm the speakers of them. A man curses another by uttering an invocation (*lam*)—which in this context is an imprecation—over, or about, him; and Nuer distinguish different kinds of curse by reference to the relationship of the persons implicated in it—*biit gwan*, the curse of a father, *biit nara*, the curse of a maternal uncle, *biit kuaara*, the curse of a leopard-skin priest, and so forth. Some of these curses are regarded as weightier than others.

The curse of father or mother is serious. A man may curse his 789
son for constant disobedience and for meanness, especially for 593
refusing him meat. Indeed, any old man may curse a youth for [561]
refusing him food, because both in a general sense and in terms of the age-set system all youths are sons to the aged, but his curse would not be as weighty as that of the true father. 'A father's curse is to hunting, to fishing, and to hoeing, but he will not curse him (his son) to cattle.' The youth may then miss his mark in hunting, fishing, and war, and his crops may fail. He may also injure himself in these occupations, or suffer one of the many possible misfortunes that beset a traveller, both in the literal sense of mishaps to one on a journey and in the figurative sense of evils that face a man on his journey through life, which the Nuer, who have a liking for meiosis, speak of collectively as 'thorns'. At its worst the curse of a father or mother may be a *biit liagh*, a curse which results in death. However, 'a father will not curse his son to cattle', because the cattle belong to the lineage and if he caused them to die he would only be harming himself and his kinsmen and ancestors.

[1] A *biit* is a curse in the sense of consigning a person to misfortune and not in the sense of swearing at a person, which is *kwith* or, where there is a joking relationship, *leng*.

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789 ship; and it can be quieted by reparation to the wronged person.
776 In an account of Nuer religion what is here important is that the
626 curse is only effective, Nuer say, because God sees that one man has right and the other wrong and allows it to act. It seems to the observer therefore that the curse, like the blessing, has its own psychic power, but that Nuer relate it to a set of moral rules of which God is conceived of as guardian and judge. The power of a curse or a blessing thus lies ultimately not with man, who is only the medium, but with God. God's role is not merely permissive, for, as we have noted, a wrong itself may, through the sufferings and lamentations of the wronged persons, bring retribution to the wrongdoers without their taking any action in the matter themselves. This is why also Nuer say of the infringement of a religious interdiction, in which no immediate question of wrong to another may arise, that it has a certain similarity to a *biit*. Formally the two ideas are quite distinct, and Nuer see a similarity between them only because in both cases there is a fault which is punished by God, in the first case indirectly and in the second directly. Consequently we are once again faced with the Nuer idea of faults, which necessitates a fuller discussion than I have so far given to it but which is also more appropriately treated separately in the next chapter.

775 The concept of *cien*, to which I now turn, has certain similarities
626 to that of *biit*, especially to the silent curse, 'the curse of the heart'. Nuer think that it bodes ill for those who have wronged a man if he dies with resentment in his heart, for he will then take ghostly vengeance on them from the grave.

The word *cien* is found in one form or another, and with common elements of meaning, in all the Nilotic languages. In Nuer it means the vengeance, generally producing sickness or other misfortune ending in death, taken by an aggrieved ghost on the living, and in its verbal form the taking of such vengeance. Nuer regard it as a most serious matter if a man dies with a legitimate grievance in his heart, for while it may be possible to make amends to a living man for a wrong done to him and thereby rid oneself of his *biit*, it is often impossible to make peace with the dead. Fear of *cien* undoubtedly, if we are to believe what Nuer say, makes them avoid, at any rate sometimes, persistently denying men justice lest they take their wrongs to the grave and from there seek settlement.

775 626 761 I give some examples of the kind of circumstances in which *cien* acts. A man haunts his kinsmen because he was slain and they neither avenged him nor exacted compensation in cattle for his death. When a man slays a close kinsman 'they [may] say "do not spear him, let him die of *cien*"'. After a while he becomes distracted and his ears ring. He loses his wits and takes to wandering alone in the bush and to sleeping there by himself at night, or he wanders to a distant country and lives there haunted. 'Nuer have no sense. A man may slay even his mother's son in anger. Well, he haunts him from the grave. He [the living man] sits moping. For two or three days together he refuses food. He wanders by himself in the bush. Then he sickens and dies.' A man may kill another secretly when they are alone together in the bush and tell no one of the deed. Then the dead man's ghost will pursue him from the grave. I was told of a case of this kind among the eastern Jikany in which the slayer married some two or three years after his crime. His first child died, then his second child, then his third child; and 'he remained childless like an impotent man'. He consulted a diviner, who wormed out of him that 'he had something in the earth', a euphemism for the body of his victim. On the diviner's advice he confessed and paid compensation for the life he had taken. Nuer told me also that a man who has witnessed a killing, though he had no part in it, yet if he keep silence, will suffer misfortune because 'it is like as though he had hidden the [dead] man'. A man who commits serious incest, such as one who has carnal relations with a woman and then with her daughter, and so causes the death of the daughter, will be haunted by her ghost. The ghost will summon him to the land of the dead, saying '*ban wa jogh*', 'let us go behind' [to the *jookni*, ghosts]. A [762] girl who is married to a man she detests and commits suicide may take vengeance from the grave on her kin who forced her to marry him. However, those Nuer whom I questioned were not in agreement in this case, some holding that the girl would not have *cuong*, right, and could not therefore harm her kin. A man who knows that his son had congress with his wife may keep silence, hoping that the son will confess and ask his forgiveness, but the son also keeps silence, even when he sees that his father is dying, so the father takes his resentment with him to the grave and punishes him from there. A man who has not been properly buried may haunt his kin. However, a man who has suffered any

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injustice may take ghostly vengeance. Nuer say also that a ghost watches over his kin and punishes those who commit some grave fault, especially that of depriving his young sons of the cattle of his herd or of their sisters' marriages. When a father or other close kinsman summons a man from the grave to join him in death Nuer use the word *tul*, which has the sense of 'to punish', to describe his action as well as the word *cien*; and they may also use the verb *be*, with the sense of sending for, or coming to fetch, or returning to get something.

An appreciation of two considerations arising from what Nuer say about ghostly vengeance gives us a further understanding of their ideas about the dead. The dead are thought to have the same feelings as when they were alive. They are resentful of injustice and bear malice to those who have wronged them. It stands to reason therefore—and this is the second consideration—that it is only those who have recently departed who avenge themselves on the living, for it is only they who can have been wronged by them. Nuer do not think of *cien* in connexion with ancestral ghosts but only in connexion with those who have recently become ghosts. It would appear that a man can still take vengeance even after he has been dispatched to the community of the ghosts by the mortuary rites, but a dead man seems to be most dangerous and his living kinsmen the most vulnerable the less the lapse of time after his death, and consequently in the period between death and the mortuary ceremonies. Those nearest to the dead are those who are most likely to be affected, for though a man can *cien*, just as he can *biit*, anyone who has done him an injury, what has been said of the *biit* can be said of the *cien*: the closer the relationship of the persons concerned the worse both the offence and its consequences. Curses and ghostly vengeance are thus two sides to the same idea and in general they have the same social incidence.

To stop the effects of *cien* it is necessary to make sacrifice to God and, where possible, reparation to the ghost for the wrong done to him. Sacrifice without reparation is of no avail. Nuer say that it may temporarily wipe out (*woc*) the *cien* from the body of the haunted man, but it will return if he does not make amends. Therefore, when he makes sacrifice he tells God 'I am sorry, I have erred; take thy cow and let the *cien* leave me.' Nuer say that God is to understand that such an expression of contrition implies the intention to make reparation, if this is possible.

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775 626 As Nuer speak about *cien* it has, therefore, the sense of an injustice crying out for vengeance. The essence of the concept is the notion of a wrong unrighted, of a grievance which demands, and rightly demands, redress. Even a living man who has no other way of getting justice may say to the man who has wronged him '*ba ji cien*', 'I will haunt you', meaning that though he cannot get justice now he will get it after he is dead. Nuer say that he may express this threat not in words but by looks. As in the case of the *biit*, so with the *cien*, it is God who makes the ghostly vengeance to work. Nuer say that the wronged ghost exacts vengeance by making his cause known to God, who sooner or later punishes the wrongdoer.

753 The moral action of *biit* and *cien*, which have a similarity to certain ideas of sin discussed in the next chapter, is in this respect very different for Nuer from the exercise of psychical and physical powers which have no moral foundation and are therefore not thought to involve divine judgement and intervention and are only thought of in connexion with Spirit, if at all, so far as all that happens in the world can ultimately be said to happen because God allows it and can be appealed to to change the course of [843] events. I refer to the evil eye (*peth*); ghouls (*roth*); the danger of pregnant women (*ther*) and to a lesser extent of their husbands, [777] an idea some of the eastern Nuer have taken over from the Anuak; [841] the danger of women who commence menstruation in the dry season month of *pet* (*koc mai*): the danger of a child after two or three of its elder brothers and sisters have died at, or shortly after, [842] birth (*jul*); monorchids (*tor*), a child conceived while its mother is still suckling (*mok*); and menstruation, which is dangerous for the cattle—no woman may drink their milk at this time. If Nuer are in danger from any of these influences they may pray and sacrifice to God, but if they do so their prayers and sacrifices are mixed up with all sorts of other and different sets of ideas and they deal with the situation mainly by magical rites which would be both inappropriate and ineffective where Spirit is concerned. They therefore cannot properly be included under the rubric of religion and so lie outside the scope of this book. They are mentioned only in order that their relative unimportance may be emphasized. That in itself is of significance. Perspective would be lost were it not understood.